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| culturally deprived                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                          | skills, oral                                |                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                             |
| reading readiness                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                          | language development                        |                                       | present attitude                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                             |
| language background                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                          | teacher attitude                            |                                       | preschool programs                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                             |
| speaking vocabulary                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                          | disadvantaged children                      |                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                             |
| 17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 250 WORDS)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                          |                                             |                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                             |
| <p>Culturally deprived children have difficulty mastering basic communication skills. While underprivileged children can communicate among themselves at a rather high level of fluency, their one-word sentences, strange speaking noises, and irregularities prevent the development of basic reading readiness skills.</p> <p>A fundamental necessity in overcoming the problem of oral language deficiencies in underprivileged children is a proper teacher attitude. In many cases the children's background in English instruction must be approached as if one were teaching a foreign language. The teacher needs to realize that vocabulary and language concepts develop slowly. He must learn to accept each child as he is and respect him as an individual.</p> <p>Whatever the school's approach, it is also of extreme importance to overcome the handicaps of cultural deprivation, particularly in regard to reading readiness. One suggested innovation concerns programs at the preschool level, such as day camps and nursery schools, to provide experiences in oral communication during the early formative years. These programs would also provide valuable parent-teacher cooperation.</p> <p>Culturally deprived children have much to contribute to society, but they must understand that, without better language mastery, they cannot bridge the gap between themselves and profitable occupations. School and preschool programs can never fully compensate for deficiencies in experience. However, such programs can do much in overcoming a poor start and preventing children from falling hopelessly behind in their education.</p> |                          |                                             |                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                             |
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| 19. SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                          |                                             | 20. DIVISION OR DEPT.                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 21. CONTRACT NO.<br><br>PROJECT NO.                                         |
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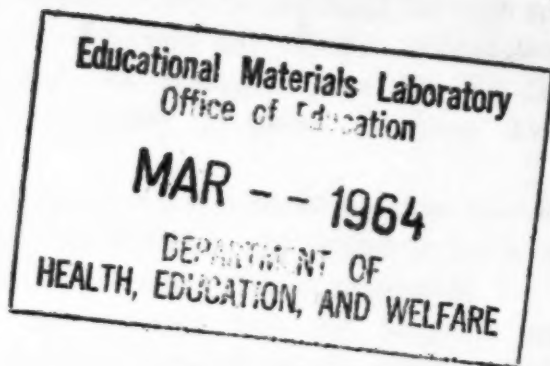
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# Reading *Unreadiness* in the Underprivileged

By  
Warren G. Cutts

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## Reprint

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# Reading Unreadiness in the Underprivileged



WARREN G. CUTTS, specialist for reading, U.S. Office of Education.

*Huh? . . . unh-hunh . . . nuttin . . . naw . . .  
wuh? . . . 'cuz . . . unh-unh . . . sho!*

**I**S THIS a readiness-for-reading vocabulary? Definitely not! Yet, unfortunately, these "words," with variations for emphasis and inflection—plus a few other one-word sentences and a generous sprinkling of vulgarities—comprise the speaking vocabularies of many culturally disadvantaged first graders. These and other strange noises that take the place of standard American English reflect the impoverished language background of these children.

Although listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills are only a part of the needs characteristic of language-handicapped children, they are a vital part. Without mastering communication skills, culturally disadvantaged youngsters can never unlock the doors that lead to useful, productive citizenship; they can never become first-class citizens.

The above is not to say that culturally disadvantaged children cannot communicate with each other. Some of them have developed "scat" language to a rather high level of fluency. Nonetheless, this scat talk does not belong to the worlds of books or of business—worlds which are foreign to these children. Thus, teachers need to approach English language instruction for these children as if they were teaching a foreign language.

The foreign language approach might be coupled with one used successfully by some teachers. They have used the analogy of work clothes, play clothes, and Sunday clothes to convey the concept to their pupils of a different language for a different purpose. Different occasions call for different modes of dress, they explain, and the same thing is true of language.

**AS** INCONCEIVABLE as it seems, some teachers expect mastery of reading and writing skills by children who reveal gross deficiencies in listening and speaking.

Obviously, children who lack readiness for reading in terms of their oral language development and background of experience must have a prolonged readiness program either in school or before they enter school. Six-year-olds who cannot talk coherently can scarcely be expected to begin reading as soon as they enter school.

Children whose language is limited to grunts and crudities need extensive experiences before they are ready for any formalized reading instruction.

If these children are to master the basic language skills of listening and speaking, they must have a wider range of experiences—both real and vicarious—than their more fortunate counterparts.

Such experiences should include listening to sto-

ries told or read by the teacher; taking field trips to parks, farms, zoos, airports, fire stations, and other points of interest; using and listening to tape recorders; hearing records; and seeing movies and filmstrips. In all these activities, the main objective is to provide pupils with opportunities for language experience. They must, therefore, have plenty of time to react to and talk about the things they have seen and heard.

**T**eacher attitude is extremely important in helping disadvantaged children. The teacher needs to realize that vocabulary and language concepts develop slowly. He must learn to accept each child as he is and to respect him as an individual. He must take nothing for granted and carefully check all his assumptions concerning the child and the child's experiences.

For example, the teacher should not assume that children are familiar with points of interest in their own cities or, indeed, within their immediate neighborhoods. Many culturally deprived children have extremely limited horizons; many have never traveled more than two blocks from home before entering school.

That children learn largely through imitation suggests another important consideration for the schools: Culturally disadvantaged children cannot be kept out of the educational main stream without perpetuating the inadequacies that set them apart in the first place. Although culturally disadvantaged children generally cannot progress as rapidly as other children, they must have an opportunity to associate with them. (For the sake of overall progress, however, probably no more than four or five disadvantaged children should be assigned to any one classroom.)

**W**HATEVER the school's approach, something must be done to overcome the handicaps resulting from cultural deprivation, particularly as it affects readiness for reading instruction. Otherwise, American teachers and administrators must be prepared to answer for the failure of an ever-increasing number of children to master the necessary skills of communication.

If the schools are to help the culturally deprived, I believe that a radical departure from typical educational procedures and instructional techniques is needed. One such innovation might be to reach down into the preschool years to provide these children with some of the experiences which other chil-

dren typically have had before coming to school.

Such experiences might be arranged through special nursery schools and day camps. Adaptations might be made, for example, from the All Day Neighborhood Schools program of New York City.

Day camps and nursery schools can also provide an opportunity for teachers and others to work cooperatively with parents. This is important, for if parents are not brought into the program and shown how they can supplement the school's work, teachers and parents of culturally disadvantaged children may foster concepts that are diametrically opposed to one another.

Of course, all of this would call for a larger staff and for a greater expenditure of money than at present.

**M**ORE and more educators are recognizing the importance of working with culturally disadvantaged children during the early formative years. School systems such as those of Dearborn, Michigan, and Quincy, Illinois, are now shifting emphasis from the junior high and high school to kindergarten and first grade. This shift is long overdue and should be extended downward until it reaches into the preschool years.

Culturally disadvantaged children must be helped to accept themselves and to realize, at the same time, that different kinds of language are appropriate as situations vary. They must come to understand that without better language mastery they cannot hope to bridge the gap which lies between themselves and profitable occupations—between second-class and first-class citizenship.

Culturally disadvantaged children have much to contribute to society. Many of them are talented in music, in art, in athletics, and in other fields, but few of them have had the opportunity to reveal these talents. Most of them must depend primarily upon the school as the socializing force that can help them to find their places as contributing American citizens.

School and preschool enrichment programs may never be able to compensate fully for deficiencies in the experience and training provided by the home. Nevertheless, such programs can go a long way toward overcoming the handicap of a poor start, and without such enrichment, culturally disadvantaged children are certain to show irreparable gaps in their learning and to fall hopelessly behind the rest of society.

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